

## **Stop**

by Tori Edwards

I.

*Where are we going?*  
my daughter asks  
as we drive away from school.  
*Where would you like to go?*  
Away,  
she says.  
*Should we go find a new trail?*  
She laughs.  
*Sure!*  
And just like that,  
we're canyon-bound,  
winding our way  
past unfamiliar avenues,  
through foothill neighborhoods,  
until we find ourselves parked at the foot  
of Corner Canyon Loop Trail.

I want to hike  
the trail's entire length,  
absorb the view of valley,  
mountain,  
horizon,  
sky.  
But my daughter longs for close-ups:  
textured stones,  
Painted Lady wings,  
knobby scrub oak bark.  
Our travel-time is slow.  
We come to a footbridge  
that stretches across the creek,  
and I start across it,  
longing to quicken our pace.  
But my daughter moves off-trail  
and below the bridge,  
straight into the water.  
*Mom, come on!*  
*This can be our new secret hide-out!*  
Reluctant, I follow her to the creek's edge,  
watch her move through water  
with impromptu grace.

*Are you coming in?*

she asks.

I take off my shoes,

wade in with tentative steps.

With a pang, I remember the creek

I played in as a child with friends,

gathering willow switches,

cottonwood leaves,

river mud,

to build a fort near the water's edge.

I remember our mothers' calls—

*Time to come in!*

and pretending we couldn't hear,

as we sipped our lemonade,

watched the dappled sunlight

drift below the treeline;

it hovered there for one glorious,

golden moment,

casting a rosy glow

over our little creek.

Then a different image fills my mind.

I think of the day, years later,

when my daughter asked me

to show her where I used to play

as a child.

*It's gone now,*

I told her.

*What do you mean?*

I couldn't explain, so drove her instead

to the development of new homes

that had taken the creek's place.

*I used to play over there.*

I tried to point past Suburban-filled driveways,

manicured lawns,

koi ponds.

*That's where the creek used to be.*

*And over there.*

I pointed to the dirt field

filled with concrete chunks,

dead branches,

weeds.

*That's where the grove of trees once stood.*

*I played there too.*

My daughter was confused.  
*Where did the trees go, Mom?*  
*Why is the creek gone?*  
She didn't understand—  
I struggled to explain something  
I couldn't understand myself.  
*I guess some things aren't meant to last.*

II.

*Mom!*  
My daughter's call brings me back to the present.  
She waves me over with an anxious hand.  
I kneel close to see what she has found—  
porcupine tracks on a clear stretch of sand.  
Her eyes widen as her fingertips  
carefully inspect the print.  
I close my eyes.  
I want to tell her to stop.  
Stop and memorize the feel of the print—  
four claws, four toes,  
rounded foot—  
grainy-smooth in the sand.  
*Stop.*  
See the Azure Butterflies all around,  
see their wings flutter up and dip,  
weave dizzy patterns  
in late afternoon light.  
*Stop.*  
Feel the water bubble between fingers,  
curl around toes,  
remember it—  
cold, clear, gentle rush.  
*Stop.*  
Breathe in the silent, sage-clean air.  
Let it fill the hollow, empty spaces  
that loss will bring  
in years to come.

*Stop,*  
*see.*  
*Notice,*  
*feel.*  
Remember.